Kentucky Literacy Link

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Inside This Issue

Special Focus: Meaningful Feedback

Why is it important?

The Characteristics of Highly Effective Teaching and Learning include an emphasis on classroom assessment and reflection, indicating that "the teacher and student collaboratively gather information and reflect on learning through a systematic process that informs instruction." Research strongly supports CHETL, as findings show:

- Clear, concise feedback matched to standards will promote student achievement. (O'Connor, 2002)
- Students must be given the opportunity to apply the feedback by trying again. (Black & Wiliam, 1998)

As highly effective teachers, we must use regular feedback gathered from student work to inform our instruction; the formative assessment process encourages learning and growth.

In this issue, we will discuss high-quality feedback, as well as strategies for implementing such feedback effectively.

You don't write because you want to say something; You write because you have something to say.

— F. Scott Fitzgerald

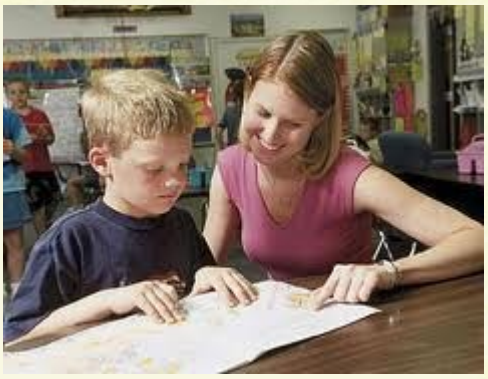
CHETL and Feedback

What do the Characteristics of Highly Effective Teaching and Learning say about feedback?

Classroom Assessment and Reflection is the second section of the Characteristics of Highly Effective Teaching and Learning (CHETL). Although CHETL covers more than feedback, it is an essential component of a reflective, assessment-driven classroom. As stated in CHETL, "the teacher and student collaboratively gather information and reflect on learning through a systematic process that informs instruction." In other words, both teacher and student use gathered data (e.g., student work, test scores) to determine instructional needs, make decisions on next steps and encourage continued growth. For the student, this decision-making will be primarily predicated on the feedback he or she receives from the teacher.

Under subsections E, F, G and H of teacher characteristics, CHETL defines more specifically the role of feedback:

- E. Co-develops scoring guides/rubrics with students and provides adequate modeling to make clear the expectations for quality performance
- F. Guides students to apply rubrics to assess their performance and identify improvement strategies
- G. Provides regular and timely feedback to students and parents that moves learners forward



- H. Allows students to use feedback to improve their work before a grade is assigned

Under student characteristics, CHETL also states:

- C. Develops and/or uses scoring guides periodically to assess his/her own work or that of peers
- D. Uses teacher and peer feedback to improve his/her work
- E. Reflects on work and makes adjustments as learning occurs

Clearly, CHETL places an emphasis on giving, receiving and responding to feedback. Beyond comparing their work to collaboratively designed rubrics and receiving feedback in that manner, students are asked to use the feedback teachers give them to improve their performance. Further, teachers are to allow for this improvement *before* grading the student. With such weight placed on feedback, it is imperative that teachers ensure we are giving students *high-quality* feedback. The next article discusses the meaning of *high-quality* feedback.

High-Quality Feedback

Beyond "Good Job!" and "Way to Go!"
Giving Feedback that Motivates Learning

We've all seen those mass-produced teacher stickers proclaiming "Great job!" "You're a star!" and "Way to go!" While students love those stickers (who wouldn't – they're fun), they are prime examples of the type of non-specific feedback that we are often guilty of giving our students. In order to encourage student growth, our feedback must go beyond the superficial into specific and meaningful information that can be used to both build confidence and inspire next steps. In *Classroom Assessment for Student Learning: Doing it Right-Using it Well* (perhaps better known as CASL), Stiggins et al. say, "It's the quality of the feedback rather than its existence or absence that determines its power." So, (as your mother might've said if she was an education researcher) if you're not going to give high-quality feedback, you might as well not give any at all.

Why Descriptive Feedback?

Research indicates that giving frequent and specific feedback on performance supports intrinsic motivation. Stiggins et al. say, "… feedback emphasizing that the learning is important leads to greater learning than feedback implying that what is important is looking good or how you compare to others." Kids learn more when we use descriptive, criterion-based feedback as opposed to numerical scoring or letter grades. This coincides with CHETL's assertion that we allow students to use our feedback BEFORE assigning a letter grade.

What Might it Look Like?

Descriptive feedback can focus on strengths or weaknesses. Feedback is most effective when it points out strengths in the work as well as areas that need improvement. This gives students motivation to grow, while building confidence in their abilities. An inspiring example of using descriptive feedback with young writers is found in the following video:
http://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/ms-noonan-making-students-into-better-writers?fd=0

As with all teaching techniques, you have to find a way to make this work for you. The next article explores strategies for effectively using descriptive feedback in your classroom.

It is the quality of the feedback rather than its existence or absence that determines its power.
- Classroom Assessment for Student Learning: Doing it Right– Using it Well

Feedback Strategies

How and when am I supposed to do this?

As we've already discussed, a highly effective teacher MUST use feedback as defined by CHETL. Further, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) support the use of high-quality feedback. CCSS indicates that students who are college and career ready (CCR) in reading, writing, speaking, listening and language are "self-directed leaners, effectively seeking out and using resources to assist them, including teachers, peers, and… [other] materials." How do those teachers and peers assist them? With feedback, of course.

Clearly, the use of feedback is supported by the standards with which we define both highly effective teaching and the inherent readiness of our students for college and beyond. When something is this important, we *make* the time. The question is, how?

When do I do this?

Feedback should encourage students to improve and delve deeper into their learning. Thus, the most effective time to give feedback is *during* the learning process. In *Active Learning Through Formative Assessment,* Shirley Clarke contends that "evaluation needs to be constant – as the learning is happening – so that changes can be made or new thinking applied **while the work is in progress**, rather than retrospectively." Retrospective improvements tend to be superficial, while "in progress" evaluation impacts the quality of the whole assignment.

How do I do this?

Feedback should be descriptive and timely. While written feedback has its place and should not be done away with entirely, research suggests that it is not as effective as verbal feedback. In other words, kids don't do very much with the notes you've scribbled all over the work they get back a week later. (And isn't that a shame after you spent hours commenting on 25, 32, 150 papers?) However, allowing the students to discuss kudos and concerns with the teacher and peers would likely yield improvement (as in the video linked on page 3.)

One practical solution Clarke suggests is randomly drawing names for student work to be analyzed by the class. The work is displayed via projector as well as copied and given to students, who immediately supply and *implement* feedback. Students then have ideas for improving their work and that of their peers, thus they can continue with individual and partner revision work.

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"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."

— Dr. Seuss, I Can Read With My Eyes Shut!

Feedback Strategies (continued from page 4)

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In her article "Helping Students Understand Assessment" from *Educational Leadership* (November 2005), Jan Chappuis gives the following practical advice:

Strategy 2: Use examples of strong and weak work.
To know where they are going, students must know what excellent performance looks like. Ask students to evaluate anonymous work samples for quality and then to discuss and defend their judgments, using the language of the scoring guide in the case of performance assessments. Such an exercise will help students develop skill in accurate self-assessment. Teachers often use strong examples, or exemplars, but avoid using weak examples because they worry that students will accidentally emulate them. On the contrary, when students evaluate weak examples that mirror common problems, they become more proficient at identifying their own weaknesses and gain a better understanding of quality.

To introduce work samples to students, you might:

1. Distribute to students a student-friendly version of the scoring guide you will use to evaluate their final products.

2. Choose one aspect of quality (one trait) to focus on.

3. Show an overhead transparency of a strong anonymous sample, but don't let students know it's a strong example. Have students work independently to score it for the one trait using the student-friendly scoring guide. You may ask students to underline the statements in the scoring guide that they believe describe the work they're examining.

4. After students have settled on a score independently, have them share their scores in small groups, using the language of the scoring guide to explain their reasoning.

5. Ask the class to vote and tally their scores on an overhead transparency. Then ask for volunteers to share their scores and the rationale behind them. Listen for, and encourage, use of the language of the scoring guide.

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"A human being is not attaining his full heights until he is educated."
— Horace Mann

Feedback Strategies (continued from page 5)

6. Repeat this process with a weak anonymous sample, focusing on the same trait. Do this several times, alternating between strong and weak papers, until students are able to distinguish between strong and weak work and independently give rationales reflecting the concepts in the scoring guide (Stiggins et al., 2004).

After looking at an anonymous work sample, the teacher says "Now let's talk about it." Students know that phrase is a signal meaning they will be interacting with their talk partners. Teachers and students will have already spent time modeling examples of good and bad talk partners and students will understand the expectations for this time.

Even young students can give one another quality feedback. Shirley Clarke suggests the use of "talk partners"- randomly selected pairs trained in listening and responding to one another. Whether talk partners work together during the brainstorming stage or are utilized during whole-group analysis of work samples, the short and active nature of the technique keeps students engaged.

Randomly paired talk partners are best, with partners changing weekly or bi-weekly. Students find this to be fair and get to appreciate a rich variety of social and learning experiences because of the frequent change. Clarke suggests using ice-breaking activities when partners change; generating success criteria for good talk and good listening, using these to discuss how well partner talk is developing, and finding ways for students to self and peer-evaluate their paired talk.

One thing that will ensure high-quality talk is to keep discussions short and focused. Conversations should be no more than two or three minutes to "avoid pupils' losing momentum and going off task." Appropriate discussion prompts would be "30 seconds to come up with one thing you can see in this writing" or "one minute to think of a good simile for cat."

When the group comes back together (prompted by a predetermined cue), all students are prepared to participate. Pressure is removed because students have had an opportunity to come up with an answer before being expected to share with the group at large, the teacher will be please to see more than the same hands raised, and chances are more well-thought out answers are given. (Read more in chapter 4 of *Active Learning Through Formative Assessment.*)

"Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself."
— John Dewey

Staying Connected

Using Social Networking as a Tool for Professional Development and Collaboration

TweetFEST

⇒ The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) will host a monthly TweetFEST to invite teachers and administrators to share resources they're using to teach the new Kentucky Core Academic Standards (KCAS) in the 2011-12 school year.

⇒ TweetFEST will be on the fourth Tuesday of each month during the 2011-12 school year (except in December). Be sure to add the #teachkcas hashtag to each tweet.

⇒ Not a Twitter user? You can sign up for a free account at www.twitter.com. School districts and individual schools who have a Twitter account also are welcome to tweet resources during the TweetFEST.

⇒ KDE uses the KDE Twitter feed to share information and converse with the education community and the residents of Kentucky. If you have a question about the TweetFEST, please contact Stephanie Siria at stephanie.siria@education.ky.gov.

The English Companion Ning

Where English teachers go to help each other

Ning describes itself as "a place to ask questions and get help. A community dedicated to helping you enjoy your work. A cafe without walls or coffee: just friends." It's free, and after answering a few simple questions about yourself, your job, and what you're reading (this question is mandatory), you become a part of this community of like-minded individuals seeking to improve pedagogical practices. The site is chock full of forums, groups, teacher-tested resources, events, photos and more. Check it out at http://englishcompanion.ning.com/.

"With limited time and funds, many teachers seek out online learning communities and free Internet resources as paths for professional development. This 'armchair PD' provides us with the ability to learn from conferences far away, investigate new ideas, or connect with other teachers who are interested in the same topics."

From "Words With Friends" -a blog by Donalyn Miller

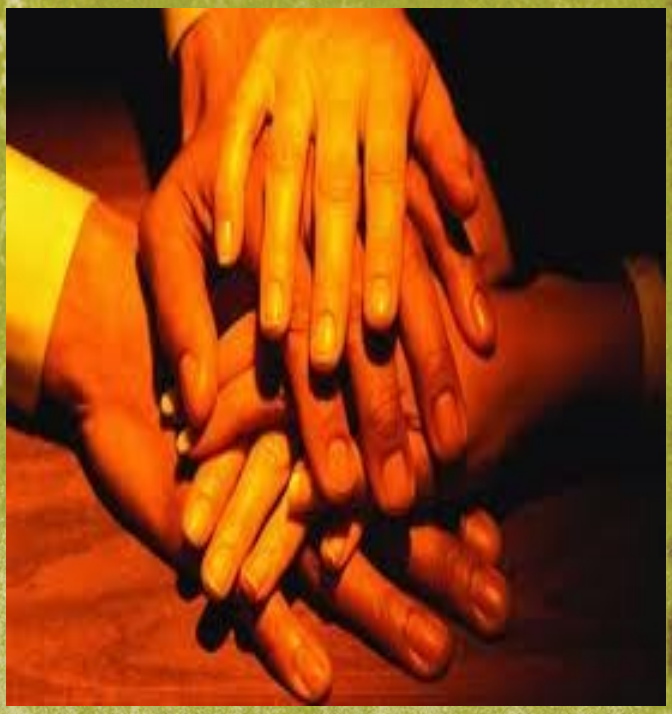
National Center for Literacy Education

A Future for Literacy Education that Puts the Expertise of Educators to Work

After decades of top-down interventions, many educators are wary of sweeping reforms. Rather than march to the drumbeat of negative news about failing schools, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE—www.ncte.org) and the Ball Foundation (www.ballfoundation.org) are joining together in a project to celebrate the work of successful school teams across the country who are achieving remarkable results in advancing literacy learning and to share what they learn with education policymakers.

Through the National Center for Literacy Education (NCLE), support will be provided and evidence compiled about how educators working in cross-disciplinary teams design and implement plans to support literacy learners in every classroom. (more).

NCTE is organized by section—Elementary, Middle, Secondary, College and Student. As a section member, you will receive timely material to keep you informed on the trends and ideas affecting education, with a special focus on your level.



"Through the National Center for Literacy Education (NCLE), support will be provided and evidence compiled about how educators working in cross-disciplinary teams design and implement plans to support literacy learners in every classroom. ."

Contact Information

If you have questions or comments, we want to help.

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Synthia Shelby- Literacy Consultant - synthia.shelby@education.ky.gov

New Staff Members

- **MK Hardaway worked at Lowe Elementary in the Jefferson County school district for five-and-a-half years before coming to KDE. MK is a graduate of the University of Louisville, where she earned a master's degree in elementary education with a literacy emphasis.**

- **Jackie White Rogers was a high school English teacher for 15 years before a four-year stint as a curriculum specialist in Pulaski County. She is looking forward to working with teacher networks across the state and her new role as a board member for the Kentucky Council of Teachers of English.**

- **Prior to coming to KDE, Synthia Shelby was a language arts and social studies teacher at Newburg Middle School in Jefferson County for six years, a language arts teacher at Lassiter Middle for two years and a middle school literacy resource teacher at JCPS Gheens Academy of Curricular Excellence and Instructional Leadership for five years. She is a State Literacy Team member and a Kentucky Reading Association Board member.**

Meet Our New Literacy Consultants:
(left to right) MK Hardaway, Jackie Rogers and Synthia Shelby

SUGGESTED READING & LINKS

How to Give Effective Feedback to Your Students

Susan Brockhart

- *Classroom Assessment for Student Learning: Doing it Right—Using it Well,* better known to many as "The CASL Book," is an outstanding source for information and classroom examples. The following pages are related to feedback: 6, 9, 29, 36-39, 40-44, 93, 154, 197, 203, 214, 236-39, 241, 245, 258, 279, 281, 283-84, 287, 295, 313, 365.
- CHETL common characteristics can be found here.
- *Active Learning Through Formative Assessment* by Shirley Clarke is an informative and easy read. Focus particularly on chapter 10 for further insight on feedback.

Access this and past *Literacy Links* on KDE's website:
Click Here

Your questions and contributions of ideas and lessons that work are welcome.
E-mail:
kay.hardaway@education.ky.gov

Submissions may be included in future issues of *Literacy Link* to help connect teachers across the state by sharing ideas, insights and best practices.